

In Memoriam

THE VERY REVEREND JOHN HENDERSON SEAFORTH
BURLEIGH, M.A., B.D., B.Litt., D.D.

The death in Peebles on Friday, 22nd March 1985, of the Very Reverend Professor-Emeritus John Henderson Seaforth Burleigh has deprived Scotland of one of her most eminent historians and the Scottish Church History Society of a well-loved Honorary President.

Born in a Border manse in the closing decade of last century, he went from Kelso High School to George Watson's and thence to the University of Edinburgh, where he obtained a First in Classics in 1915. War service with the King's Own Scottish Borderers interrupted his studies for the ministry of the Church of Scotland, but in 1920 he graduated B.D. and entered on a period of historical research in Paris, Strasbourg, Prague and Oxford which eventually led to the completion of a B.Litt. thesis on the Bohemian reformer, John Hus. An assistantship in St George's, Edinburgh was followed by remarkable ministries at Fyvie, in Aberdeenshire, and at St Enoch's, Dundee. In 1931 he was called to succeed his old teacher, Professor James Mackinnon, in the Chair of Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh, from which (after serving for a longer term than any of his predecessors) he retired in 1964.

His reputation grew steadily over the years: among Reformed churchmen, as editor of the *Evangelical Quarterly*; among Augustine scholars (not only in the English-speaking world), as expositor of the great Doctor's philosophy of history in *The City of God* (the Croall Lectures, published in 1949) and as editor of his *Earlier Writings* for the Library of Christian Classics; above all, among historians of the Scottish Church. A zealous participant in the activities of this Society, he addressed it on such topics as "The Scottish Reforming Councils, 1549-1559" and "The Scottish Reformation as seen in 1660 and 1760", and was its President from 1950 to 1953. His *History of the Church in Scotland* has been the standard textbook on the subject since its publication in 1960.

As a teacher, his manner was so unassuming, his learning so unpretentious, his wit so skilfully veiled, that he probably always appealed most to his abler students; but none could deny the clarity and cogency of his expositions or the penetration and balance of his judgments. A host of ministers, missionaries and academics around the world bear testimony to the intellectual and spiritual influence which he wielded — and still wields.

A diligent supervisor of research, a trusted administrator in Department, Faculty and University, a genial, modest and efficient Dean, he occupied a very special place in the life of the academic community here in Edinburgh. But it is perhaps as a churchman

that he would most have wished to be remembered. He served the Kirk well, and his labours — as a conscientious pastor, arresting preacher, indefatigable convener of the Church and Nation Committee, signatory of the “Bishops Report”, and in a multitude of other ways — were fittingly recognised by his election as Principal of New College in 1956 and (the summit of his career) as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1960, the year when the Fourth Centenary of the Scottish Reformation was celebrated by the fathers and brethren in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and distinguished visitors from near and far.

While it mourns his passing, the Scottish Church History Society salutes the memory of one of its outstanding members and office-bearers, and extends its sincere sympathy to his daughter Anne, his son John, and their families.

A. C. C.